NCA

VOC FOR IOP/FN

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EDWARD CONLEY

ASEAN: ANOTHER STEP FORWARD

ANNCR:

THE RECENT SUMMIT MEETING OF LEADERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN) PRODUCED A NUMBER OF DECISIONS TO MOVE THE ASSOCIATION CLOSER TO ITS GOAL OF STRONG ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL COOPERATION. VOA'S EDWARD CONLEY HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS:

VOICE:

(OPT) THE MEETING AT BALI OF THE LEADERS OF THE PHILIPPINES, MALAYSIA, INDONESIA, THAILAND AND SINGAPORE WAS THE FIRST ASEAN SUMMIT SESSION SINCE THE ASSOCIATION WAS FORMED NINE YEARS AGO. (END OPT)

THE CONFERENCE WAS CALLED TO ADD HIGH LEVEL IMPETUS TO ASEAN'S REGIONAL COOPERATIVE EFFORTS -- ESPECIALLY IN THE WAKE OF THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER OF INDOCHINA. IT PRODUCED AGREEMENT ON STEPS TO WELD THE FIVE NATION GROUPING INTO A STRONGER ASSOCIATION. NONE OF THE SUMMIT DECISIONS CAN BE DESCRIBED AS DRAMATIC. BUT THE FACT THAT LEADERS OF STATES WHICH IN SOME CASES HAD VIEWED EACH OTHER WITH SUSPICION, IF NOT HOSTILITY, AND OF STATES WITH DIFFERENT ECONOMIC PRIORITIES COULD AGREE TO PLANS FOR CLOSER POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION IS OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE.

THE TREATY OF AMITY AND COOPERATION AGREED TO BY ASEAN'S LEADERS SETS UP A COUNCIL TO MEDIATE DISPUTES BETWEEN MEMBER STATES IF THEY SO DESIRE. WHILE THE COUNCIL DOES NOT WIELD ABSOLUTE POWER UNLESS BOTH SIDES IN ANY DISPUTE

AGREE, ITS ESTABLISHMENT AT LEAST PROVIDES A SAFETY VALVE AGAINST POLITICAL EROSION WITHIN ASEAN.

ALTHOUGH EFFORTS TO FULLY COORDINATE THE ASSOCIATION'S ECONOMIC FUTURE -- PERHAPS IN THE FORM OF AN ASEAN FREE TRADE ZONE -- ARE STILL FAR FROM FULFILLMENT, THE SUMMIT MEETING DID CALL FOR INCREASED ECONOMIC COOPERATION AMONG THE FIVE NATIONS. ECONOMIC MINISTERS OF THOSE COUNTRIES WILL MEET NEXT MONTH TO DISCUSS INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION.

LOOKING REALISTICALLY AT THEIR COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS IN INDOCHINA, ASEAN'S LEADERS AGREED THAT THOSE REGIMES WOULD BE WELCOME TO SIGN THE AMITY TREATY, AND AT THE SAME TIME DISCUSSED THE NEEDS FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE AT HOME AND POSSIBLE BI-LATERAL SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS TO STEM COMMUNIST-LED INSURGENCIES.

THE ASEAN SUMMIT MEETING AT BALI DID NOT CURE ALL THE SUSPICIONS AND ECONOMIC INBALANCES WHICH HAVE IN PART BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ASSOCIATION'S MODEST REGIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING ITS NINE YEAR HISTORY. BUT IT WENT BEYOND THE TOURISM, TELECOMMUNICATIONS, SHIPPING AND AVIATION ACCORDS OF THE PAST AND DEVELOPED FRAMEWORKS FOR MORE AMBITIOUS COOPERATION IN THE FUTURE.

AS SINGAPORE'S PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW NOTED AFTER THE CONFERENCE, THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF BALI MEAN THAT ASEAN'S FUTURE IS NO LONGER IN DOUBT.

GH/RCS